

Advertizing activities in social media and the creation of a community belonging in the digital era

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Abstract: The promotion of brands, services and products using forms of digital advertizing is nowadays employed strategically by organizations in order to reach customers. This kind of advertizing uses digital media for the distribution of marketing and communication messages in attempt to promote interactivity and raise effectiveness. In that way, both servicing and engaging customers are the aim. This paper argues that social media may create a virtual community which spreads the ‘sense of belonging’ to such a community for potential customers in order to feel part of it even if they have never met. Social media have a significant role to play on the creation of the experience—brand experience on the Internet and the engagement of the consumers to this process with the provision of an ‘e-experience’ and their participation which can be of outmost importance. Managers in charge of social media management may be part of the consumer discussions in a manner that is consistent with the organization’s mission; the creation of blogs and networks that bring customers together may enforce the creation of e-communities which can be accomplished using specific symbols and a language that is familiar to this online group. The integration of social media into the marketing programme of an organization or a company as tools consists of an innovative procedure for the co-creation of experience with the consumer.

Key words: social media, innovation, advertizing, communication activities, online imagined communities

1. Introduction

Social media’s strategy implementation and application of services provided on social media such as pre-scheduled posts, ad hoc post launches, comments’ replies, competitions via apps or wall contests from companies is a successful way to manage to implement such services.

We argue that in fact social media may offer the opportunity for companies to create an online ‘imagined community’, a term initially used in another framework (in regard to elements of nationality and nationalism of a population) from Benedict Anderson in the 1980’s to argue that even if people have never met, they may feel that they belong to the same group (Anderson, 1991). This concept, in fact, may well be

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used to the environment of social media offering the opportunity for companies to create an 'imagined community' among their targeted groups all over the world transcending in that way physical boundaries (Danas and Kavoura, 2013).

The social media networking have a lot to offer to a company's innovative activities for advertizing itself and communicating with its existing and potential target groups. Since physical and digital world will be inextricably connected, iPhone applications and mobile technology, with which people are linked to their profile on social media such as Facebook and Twitter, allow the exchange of data; may bring huge revenues via online shopping to the companies with the collection of information about the potential target groups associated with their specific interests (Noff, 2011).

This paper aims to illustrate that social media may create a virtual community which spreads the 'sense of belonging' to potential customers in order to feel part of it even if they have never met, sharing a specific language and symbols. Examples of best practices from social media's use and the advertizing that takes place on social networks are provided. These show that social media have a significant role to play on the creation of the experience-brand experience on the Internet. The paper succeeds in making a theoretical contribution in regard to the way special symbols and a script language used in social media may engage the consumer to this process of community belonging.

2. The role of advertizing and social media in creating the sense of belonging in the digital era

Advertizing is not communication for its own sake; it has a capacity to communicate cultural meaning and resonate ideological tenets with consumers (Kilamby, Laroche and Richard, 2013, p. 48). Nowadays, companies are increasingly using social networks in their advertizing strategies.

Thus, advertizing has to shift from a message intended for a specific audience from a specific person, state, stakeholder who promotes this message, towards an 'effective community of minds' in order for the message to be received, taking into consideration the prior knowledge of the target group (Kilamby et al., 2013, p. 49).

We argue that advertizing may contribute to the creation of potential experiences one may have, stimulated by slogans, websites and other media communications (Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2009) in relation to a product or a service. These experiences can be real, direct and existing where the person may already have personal knowledge of what is advertized and promoted or indirect. This latter may be experiences that are developed on a virtual and digital environment without someone to have actually physically taken part (see for example the way Carinthia, Austria is branded virtually on the Internet providing experiences to the potential visitors [Kavoura and Bitsani, 2013]).

Virtual communities, as is the case with traditional communities, are used to exchange information and ideas, to share common interests, to entertain people, to offer support, to promote products and services, to create and support relations and emerge when all agree to be part of them with the aim to use the products and services on offer (Siomkos and Tsiamis, 2004; Kavoura and Bitsani, 2013). Virtual communities allow the support of interrelations

among people, they differ from the traditional ones in that they offer multiple ways of communication and in that their members share the sense of belonging to the community (Siomkos and Tsiamis, 2004). Internet allows the communication on one-to-one basis, one-to-all-to-one basis and one-to-all basis (Siomkos and Tsiamis, 2004, p. 206).

Interrelation exists for virtual communities even if people do not meet and the sense of belonging among each other is created. This is the case for products and services. Kavoura, Pelet, Rundle-Thiele and Lecat (2014) for example found that direct community belonging increases behavioural loyalty using as a case study wine, where implementing communities, promoting and advertizing them via a social media communication programme may offer an important means to build behavioural loyalty towards wine.

Research in tourism also illustrated the effort made by companies to make online invitation for the participation of the tourists' senses, in other words, emotion and sense of belonging to an exclusive community in relation to branding of rural tourism in Carinthia, Austria as a destination memorable to visit and experience (Kavoura and Bitsani, 2013). Thus, brand experiences may have a role to play in the company's–customers' relationship on an online, digital environment that social media may create and enforce (Stavrianea and Kavoura, 2014).

We define social media websites, the web-services platforms that allow people to: (1) create public- or semi-profiles within a defined framework, (2) create a list of other users with whom they are connected in some way, and (3) to see and consult lists of friendly connections of their friends and the profiles of them. Social networking sites allow users to write in columns and reveal the social circle/ circle of acquaintances. This can result in interpersonal and social links between individuals that otherwise could have been achieved, but nevertheless, this fact is not always the target, since the 'meetings' are often based on non-web links between people (Papacharissi, 2009; Danias and Kavoura, 2013). Social media platforms are databases of personal information, they become tools for (personal) storytelling and narrative self-presentation (van Dijck, 2013, p. 200). To participate in this storytelling, other people may use specific symbols and a specific form of language, using key words and special symbols (such as the use of hashtags, #, @) (Marwick and Boyd, 2010). Those who are able and willing to participate in this community belonging need to share special language and use symbols that are 'sacred' because they belong to this and only this community.

3. Social media strategy implementation and application of services provided on social media—economic considerations, trends and future outlook

People are connecting with their favourite businesses on Facebook at a massive scale and telling their friends which businesses and products they love. Over 1 billion people are on Facebook while 3 billion likes and comments are generated daily. This may show the tremendous capabilities social media may offer and illustrate the innovation potential that companies may have from employing social media (Cutler, 2012). Social advertizing market may reach \$11 billion by 2017, up from \$4.7 billion in 2012 (Salesforce.com, 2013). Revenue was \$2.50 billion and the revenue from advertizing was \$2.27 billion, the first quarter of 2014, up

72% and up 82% respectively the same period in 2013 (<http://investor.fb.com/releasedetail.cfm?ReleaseID=842071>).

Figure 1 presents visualization of Facebook friendships as it was created by Paul Butler in 2010 while Figure 2 provides information on days of week that posts and comments are happening on Facebook.



Figure 1. Facebook friendships as visualized by Paul Butler

Source: (Facebook Photobucket, 2010).

After the company is provided with information on days of week that posts and comments are happening on Facebook, economic issues need to be taken into consideration from the company in regard to the advertizing costs and the effective media strategy it may follow. Table 1 highlights the total cost divided by number of clicks per advertisement, economic issues that a company needs to take into consideration before setting off to initiate innovative activities with the contribution of social media. One may see that with 0.08\$, cloth and fashion have the lowest click per advertisement in 2013 and at 0.34\$, travel and leisure have the highest. Then, the company should get financial advice over the efficiency of social media and advertizing campaigns and tools to manage these campaigns are available (<http://www.salesforcemarketingcloud.com/>).

Ethics are also essential and need to be carefully managed for online marketing and advertizing decisions and strategies since access to the Internet is wide and information provided there may not be valid thus, security issues can be a major drawback (Perkel, 2006 or see for example what in September 2011 the magazine *Bloomberg BusinessWeek* broadcasted in regard to the existence of a large market of fake reviews, with review authors located in several locations across the world. The writers were hired through the Web by companies or travel agencies [Weise,

2011]). That is why guidelines for advertized products and services should exist for advertizing on social media as it exists on Facebook (see for example advertizing gambling and lotteries which provides a well defined example for Facebook: Advertising on Facebook, 2014).

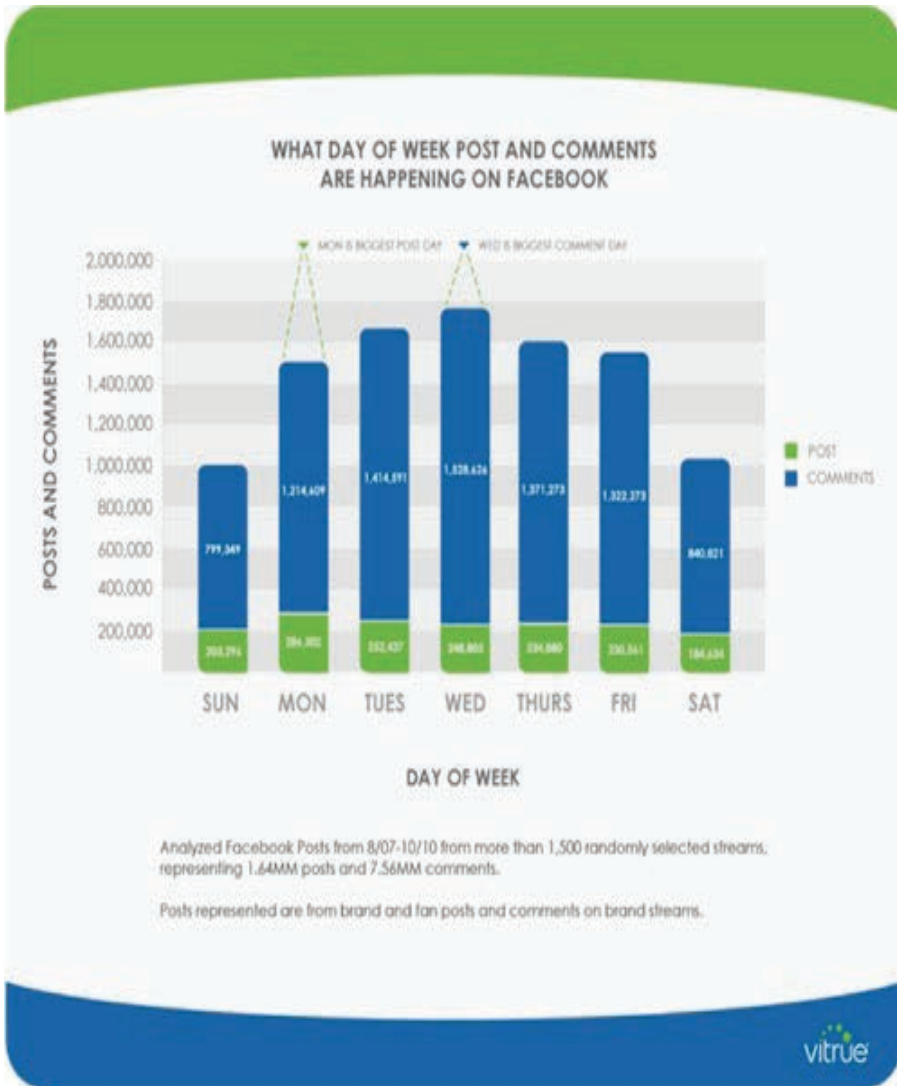


Figure 2. What day of week posts and comments are happening on Facebook

Source: (Warren, 2010).

Table 1. Cost per click per advertisement by industry in 2013

Industry	Cost per click (in dollars)	Industry	Cost per click (in dollars)
Advertizing and consulting	0.22	General retail	0.31
Automotive	0.34	Health and beauty	0.36
Clothing and fashion	0.08	Non-profit	0.19
Consumer packaged goods	0.30	Other online services	0.23
Dating	0.38	Publishing	0.22
Deals	0.39	Sports	0.36
Entertainment	0.26	Technology	0.20
Finance	0.21	Telecommunications	0.34
Food and beverage	0.21	Travel and leisure	0.35
Gaming	0.30		

Source: (Salesforce.com, 2013, and data elaborated by the author).

The environment has a significant role to play and influences the way advertizing affects digital media. Companies and organizations which aim to be in contact with customers and establish and maintain fruitful relationships with online customers need to take into consideration social, political, economic, legal and ethical issues that may emerge in regard to the use of social media and the communication through them.

Innovation can exist for Start Ups/ Entrepreneurship by following 4 steps:

Step 1: Build the Facebook Page.

Step 2: Identify and connect people with ads.

Step 3: Engage the audience with quality content and reach the ones who are mostly related to the company.

Step 4: Influence the friends of the company's fans and maximize the impact (Facebook basics, 2014).

When the organization or company employs social media as its tool for advertizing and communicating its products and services, emphasis should be put upon the connection of people all over the world in the digital era, creating in that way a community based approach. Experiences occur when a consumer attaches feelings and/ or moods towards a brand experience and this may take place virtually on the Internet and the company's websites (Kavoura and Bitsani, 2013). The steps described above in fact argue for communicating information that is of relevance to the users of social media in an effort to create an online community of like-minded people. Then, people with similar interests may be able to communicate and participate in such a community at their own will.

The use of specific language requirements (for example, hashtags, #, @, likes, etc.) in order to get in touch with a specific online community and be part of the discussion for a specific subject, offers the possibility to people and company's customers to bind together under these

specific references and key words, sacred and shared from the members of the online community.

There are many ways which may contribute to the consumers' active participation to a company's co-creation of a community online framework. Replies to the comments are innovative in a way that may bring the consumer to a community targeted for him/ her and aiming to satisfy and fulfill his/ her needs.

The company provides suggestions, advice, tips in regard to the use of the product/ service and the consumer engages in a community s/he wishes—see for example, Pampers, a brand of baby products marketed by Procter and Gamble (Timeline Photos Pampers, 2014).

The creation of cover photos and images where the company shows its gratitude towards its fans consists of another way to engage consumers to the community social media may create. It is typical that a Greek small and medium-sized company communicated with its customers and created a fan photo for New Year in 2014 on Facebook, including the number of its 100,000 fans—which is a big number of social media fans for a company (Figure 3). Interactivity exists and organizations may well take that into consideration.



Figure 3. Cover image on Facebook of a small and medium-sized enterprise celebrating New Year's Eve

Source: (Cover Photos, 2014).

4. Conclusion and managerial implications for the use of social media by companies and organizations

This paper examined the significance of the creation of a virtual community in social media. This online community: a) spreads the 'sense of belonging' to the potential customers in order to feel part of it even if they have never met; b) creates and shares experiences/ brand experiences on the Internet; c) engages the consumer and his/ her participation to this process; d) brings together people with similar interests who participate in such a community at their own will; e) is close to those members who use specific language requirements (for example, hashtags, #, @, likes, etc.) in order to be part of the discussion for a specific subject, offers the possibility to people and a company's customers to be together under these specific references and key words, sacred and shared from the members of the online community.

If an online community is created between a company or an organization and its customers with the contribution of social media, the online community that is created provides a database for the company itself: a) to reinforce such a community; b) to do research on people's habits and behaviour in regard to the company's activities, products and services; c) to make the customer both an ambassador and a participant to the company's views and ideas which may be communicated through the specific language use of social media to the rest of the world.

In order for companies not to spend advertising money on the social advertising market, the measurement of one's own performance and costs against such performance is of utmost significance so as to focus optimization efforts within a particular market (Salesforce.com, 2013).

Different forms of digital advertising are nowadays employed strategically by organizations in order to reach customers. This kind of advertising uses digital media for the distribution of promotional messages in an attempt to promote interactivity and raise effectiveness.

Apart from employing social media as a tool for advertising the organization, social media allow for the creation of the sense of belonging and customers are offered the opportunity to actively engage with the company's website. Social media may thus create a virtual community and experiences for customers, yet empirical research should take place to specify potential relations existing in association with online imagined communities.

Managers in charge of social media management may shape consumer discussions in a manner that is consistent with the organization's mission via the creation of blogs and networks, innovatively integrating social media into the marketing programme of an organization or a company. They may create the sense of belonging to a community where people from different parts may join, feel they have a kind of membership, which allows them to purchase and consume as members of this group.

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Działalność reklamowa w mediach społecznościowych a tworzenie społeczności należącej do ery cyfrowej

Abstrakt: Promocja marek, usług oraz produktów przy użyciu form reklamy cyfrowej jest obecnie strategicznie stosowana przez organizacje, aby dotrzeć do klientów. Ten rodzaj reklamy wykorzystuje media cyfrowe do dystrybucji przekazów marketingowych i komunikacyjnych, aby promować interakcyjność i podnieść efektywność. W ten sposób celem staje się zarówno obsługa, jak i angażowanie klientów. Niniejsza praca dowodzi, że media społecznościowe mogą tworzyć wirtualną społeczność, która rozpowszechnia „poczucie przynależności” do takiej społeczności wśród potencjalnych klientów, aby czuli się jej częścią, nawet jeśli nigdy się nie spotkali. Media społecznościowe mają do odegrania istotną rolę w kreowaniu doświadczenia –

doświadczenia marki w internecie – oraz angażowaniu w ten proces konsumentów, umożliwiając „e-doświadczenie” i ich uczestnictwo, które może mieć pierwszorzędne znaczenie. Menadżerowie odpowiedzialni za zarządzanie mediami społecznościowymi mogą zabierać głos w dyskusjach konsumenckich w sposób zgodny z misją organizacji; tworząc blogi i sieci integrujące klientów, mogą oni wymusić tworzenie e-społeczności, które można urzeczywistnić przy użyciu określonych symboli oraz języka znanego danej grupie internetowej. Integracja mediów społecznościowych w programie marketingowym organizacji lub spółki jako narzędzia składa się z innowacyjnej procedury współtworzenia doświadczenia z konsumentem.

Słowa kluczowe: media społecznościowe, innowacja, reklama, działalność komunikacyjna, internetowe wspólnoty wyobrażone